Pick up Latin, Swedish at NTU

Language modules popular with students; 16 electives offered

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Nil sine labore is Latin for nothing without labour.

It is also a rallying call for Nanyang Technological University (NTU) students keen to learn what has often been dismissed as a dead language. The students are so willing to slog that NTU said classes are oversubscribed.

Since August, a group of 24 students has been going for weekly Latin classes offered for the first time by any university here.

NTU’s Centre for Modern Languages, which introduces new languages based on student demand and potential usage, has also brought in Swedish.

This brings the total number of language electives at NTU to 16. Languages taught include Arabic, Italian and Russian.

Associate Professor Francesco Paolo Cavallaro, the centre's director, said it was surprised by the demand for Latin. The class—taught by Dr Perono Cacciafoco Francesco—has more than 70 students on its waiting list.

Another 32 students are learning Swedish from Mr Marns Jakob Hedberg, who, like Dr Perono Cacciafoco, is a member of the NTU teaching staff.

Students are tested on their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, with quizzes, tests, oral and listening tests, and other activities.

Third-year linguistics and multilingual studies major Benjamin Goh, 24, took up the Latin class because he wanted to learn a classical language, after picking up Italian and German.

“I wanted to understand how language evolved over time,” he said. Latin, which originated from the Roman Empire, has left its impact on many other languages in fields such as linguistics, medicine and science. It is the source of nearly 80% of all words in Romance languages such as French and Italian.

“Through Latin I understand a bit more about Roman and Greek culture in the past, and I also see how English is so simplified compared to these older languages,” said Mr Goh.

Biological science student Neo Shi Yong, 24, decided to learn Swedish because he plans to take up postgraduate studies in biology in Sweden after graduating.

“People are friendly... but they are more willing to open up if you know some of their language and culture, even though they can speak English,” said Mr Neo, who spent six months this year in Sweden on an exchange programme.

Sweden is one of the top five most popular exchange destinations for NTU students.

Language modules are becoming increasingly popular. More than 6,600 students took up such classes in the academic year that started in August last year, compared with 5,600 in 2014.

Prof Cavallaro said the centre does not just teach language. “It’s also an introduction to the culture, history and traditions of a particular country.”

LATIN AS A GATEWAY

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